

SUBMISSION TO FLOOD INQUIRY (18/5/22)

Murwillumbah 2484.

Early on Feb 28 I text-messaged my granddaughter, who lived in Lismore with her 3yo daughter, to check on her situation. She was very distressed because waters were rising and she couldn't contact the SES. I said I would try. I phoned, reached the central office and was asked what area I wanted. I was transferred to the Lismore SES. The phone rang twice and then disconnected. Emergency services should *never* just hang up on frightened people! There should, at the very least, always be a recorded message with some directions. My granddaughter was rescued by a person in a boat who had come to rescue her neighbour. Reliable communication options are essential during catastrophes. Without social media the terror, chaos and death toll would have been much worse.

The community-led rescues were breathtakingly heroic, while gvt and emergency services were non-existent. This is unacceptable by any standards. Obviously SES resources are totally inadequate for major disasters. The Army should be used immediately for natural catastrophes. Soldiers are paid from the public purse; there is no military attack happening here at the moment; the army has helicopters and trained operators who are required to descend and retrieve in war situations; and who are trained to work in difficult terrains and conditions. And, unlike the SES volunteers, I would expect soldiers to be able to leap out of bed at a moment's notice and capably attend to high-stress situations as required. I believe that the army is better utilized in helping Australian communities than in sitting around their barracks.

Clear lines of authority during disasters must be established. My view is that, with the Armed forces as first attenders, it would be logical for the Federal gvt to be the prime authority (and major source of various supports, including funding for relocation options).

Finally, Lismore is still a ghost town. It is shocking and depressing to visit, and I can't imagine the ongoing stress of living there, probably in the gutted shells of their homes. 'Flat-pack' demountables should be available at short notice wherever needed (perhaps transported in the Army's big cargo planes). Plans should include transport and placement sites — preferably in the form of small communities with 'tent shops' there for the displaced business owners. There should be on-site staffed offices offering support with forms, referrals, information. The sites would be the basis for more permanent communities when options for relocation become available.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views.

Sincerely *PH*

PH: